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ABSTRACT

The accounts of the Puritan-Indian relations in the New World consist of ambivalent and paradoxical perspectives, perplexing narratives, often more diametrically opposed to than supporting each other. Among several representative accounts, Alden Vaughn contended that both the Indians and the Puritans in the New World were friendly, cooperative, and helpful to each other. In contrast, Parry Miller hardly saw any Indians in early America in any literal sense. Francis Jennings vigorously charged that the European settlers in New England were most inhumane and most inconsiderate in their dealings with the Indians. In addition, Mrs. Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative strongly pointed out how God-centered the lives of some New England Puritans were. Since European America began, the American Indians have been severely wounded. Their trails of tears and deaths extend over much of the land for 350 years, representing lost cultures, lands, families, traditions, and nearly lost languages. The red man and woman in the contemporary world--not Americans, not Indians, but prisoners of war, captives in their own homeland--have been mortally wounded in the past. Now it is time to cease wounding the Indians and begin to heal them. It is not the Puritans or God but contemporary Americans and Indians who must help heal them in the future. (JK)

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PURITAN INDIANS: WOUNDED WITH ONE HAND AND HEALED BY THE OTHER

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When a scholar attempts to understand and define the relationships most Indians had with the first settlers who populated New England, point of view looms as one of the dominant factors influencing both the colonists' writings and the modern accounts written about the Indians. Not surprisingly, therefore, in a large measure what is fact and what is fiction about Puritan relations with Indian Americans usually depends most upon who is writing a particular account and what the that writer's frame of reference is. Sorting out fact from fiction through a writer's frame of reference is not just an interesting, rather it is an essential task if one is to discover what really happened in early America and why it happened.

In several representative accounts, the relationships of the early New England colonists with the Indians are characterized in contrary, confusing terms. Alden Vaughn, writing on the Puritans and Indians from 1620 to 1675, for example, states conclusively that "The New England Puritans followed a remarkably humane,

considerate, and just policy in their dealings with the Indians." (1) It is important to note that this generalization covers all of the first fifty-five years the Europeans had been on this continent, not just the first five or six. To Vaughn, the Indians in the New World were friendly, cooperative, and helpful to the European explorers and settlers, and so were the Europeans towards the Indians. The Indians, says Vaughn, taught the Europeans how to survive in the wilderness of New England by producing and gathering food. The settlers, in return, were no less equally helpful to the Indians, only in different ways. The whites assisted the Indians by sharing goods and technology with the red men including guns, and cloth, and horses. The Indians through the Pemaquid, Samoset, and the three Wampanoags named Massasoit, Squanto, and Hobomah, became missionaries to the shiploads of white people coming ashore. (2)

In contrast, Parry Miller, one of the most respected writers on Colonial America, hardly "saw" any Indians in early America in any literal sense. And he hardly had a point of view towards them except that they were the "unpeople of America." They were nothing, for Miller fails to make a second reference to them in volume I of The Puritans. Indian Americans to Miller simply weren't important enough to be the subjects of his writing. (3)

Francis Jennings' The Invasion of America (1975), in sharp contrast, decries the relationships the whites had with the Indians in early America. Jennings vigorously charges that the European settlers in New England were most inhumane and most inconsiderate in their dealings with the Indians. (4) Further,

Jennings challenges the colonists'contention that the first American war, the Pequot War, was made on the part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to ". . .protect itself from the fiercest of the New England tribes." (5)

A single glance at Jennings' explosive attacks on and fiery attitude toward the colonists forces a reader to ask whether the Puritans and Indians were in deeds humane and understanding toward each other or whether writers such as Vaughn were dead wrong in their defenses of the colonists' treatment of the Indians. If Jennings' claims are correct, then the early Pilgrims and the Indians were not good friends. From the beginning of his account, Jennings presents the European WASPS in a scorching, blistering light. The settlers ate Indian turkey and Indian-supplied vension roasts, all right, but the colonists also:

> lied to the Indians, stole from them, murdered them, scalped them, captured them, tortured them, raped them, sold them into slavery, confiscated their land, destroyed their crops, burned their homes, scattered their possessions, gave them alcohol, undermined their systems of belief, and infected them with diseases that wiped out ninety percent of their numbers within the first hundred years after contact. (6)

Obviously, as summarized briefly above, Vaughn and Jennings present two contradictory, two divergent, two irreconcilable ways of viewing reality and of making judgments about it. Such confusion and controversy characterize, almost typify, most accounts written about the colonists and the Indians and their relations. As the expression at the beginning this paper suggests--"Wounded With One Hand and Healed by the Other"--the

accounts of the Puritan--Indian relations in the New World consist of ambivalent and paradoxical perspectives, perplexing narratives, often more diametrically opposed to than supporting each other. These narratives, thus, can not be treated as simple dilemmas that lend themselves to straight-forward either/or, right or wrong, fact or fiction mentalities and answers.

Take, for example, the narration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson as she recounts being taken into captivity by the Indians and finally being restored to her own people. Rowlandson says she was taken captive by ". . . black creatures of the night; " was forced to camp in new-fallen snow; was surrounded constantly by howling, raving infidels; was thrust into fire to live with unclean devils, in the pits of hell. (7) But then Mrs. Rowlandson twists her position by asserting that she willingly went into the wilderness with the Indians "because God wanted her to." Further, only one of twenty-four captives taken from the house where she was staying, Mrs. Rowlandson weeps that all the white prisoners were torn viciously from their house and were cast into the hostile wilderness, suffering great tribulations and unceasing pain. The trials were so great that eventually only Mrs. Rowlandson and one other person escaped their tormentors and returned home. The others died, says Mrs. Rowlandson, at the hands of the devils. And yet these deaths, she says, were deaths that came at the hands of God. (8) Mrs. Rowlandson's captivity narrative strongly points out how God-centered the lives of some New England Puritans were and how great a role predestination, God's will, and fate played in the

affairs of these people. Ultimately for Mrs. Rowlandson, everything that happens or does not happen in the Puritans' or Indians' lives is because of God.

But with or without God, Mrs. Rowlandson does not consider the Indians who stole her the sharing, cooperative, friendly people Vaughn talks of in his accounts--Indians who for fifty years helped the settlers enjoy Thanksgivings and prayer and crops and the land. For Mrs. Rowlandson, the Indians were not sharers, they were not equals, they were not even human beings. They were, in fact, Godless "butcherers" and "murderers;" "evil wretches" and "imps" whose camps and campfires resembled those found only in the burning, smoldering, sulphurous cauldrons and black fires of the depths of hell. For Mrs. Rowlandson and for those who died bloody deaths on the Indian trails, the New England Indians were enemies, fiends, and infidels who lived lives of decadence, debauchery, and devilry.

But were they? And yet did they? The most interesting details about Mrs. Rowlandson's Indian captors is not the Indians' treatment or mistreatment of Mrs. Rowlandson and her fellow prisoners, as interesting as these details are. As one would expect, Mrs. Rowlandson was extremely insecure and was frightened nearly to death by simply being in the unfamiliar presence of the Indians, let alone by being a prisoner among them, being forced to eat and walk and sleep among them the Indians in ways they had lived for hundreds of years--with mocassins, without beds in stone or wood houses, without fireplaces and stoves, without artificially warmed and decorated

environments, without familiar friends and food and surroundings, and without the familiar sounds and exchanges she enjoyed in English, the language she shared with others as mother tongue.

But these contrasts between the two peoples, their cultures, and their differing life styles are still not the most important perspectives underlying the Rowlandson narrative, as interesting as they are. The most enlightening perspective in the whole Rowlandson narrative is the detailing and portraying the role that she believed God played in the lives of the Puritan colonists and the native Indians. Understanding God's controlling, directing role and pre-destination in the lives of His children is the key to understanding the divergence, contractions and claims that flavor the Rowlandson document and influence the facts and conclusions stated in other contemporary, as well as modern, accounts.

When she writes: "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he has made on earth," (9) both in content and style, Mrs. Rowlandson reveals the essential spirit and critical perspective that shapes her writing. It is not inconsistent to read of beatings and torture that caused ". . .blood that ran down to the heels," and then read almost at the same time, the woman saying, "I have found peace and comfort in my sufferings and agony." (10)

It is consistent, then, to read Of Mrs. Rowlandson's weeping and wailing, bemoaning her plight among the Indians, comparing herself to the nation of Israel being taken captive into Babylon, all by the hand of God. It is understandable that Mrs.

Rowlandson forgets and leaves the horrible details related to her captivity among the Indians to preach sermons on God--one of them being, for example, a strong sermon on the evils of tobacco, saying, "But I thank God, he has now given me power over it; surely there are many who may be better imployed than to ly sucking a stinking Tobacco-pipe." (11) Here again, even to the point of smoking or not smoking, God's hand directs, controls, the lives of His children--what they write, how they write it, and whether they themselves lift a hand to smoke or not to smoke a stinking tobacco pipe.

It is clear that the key perspective of the early colonial settlers was that they would do what God had ordained them to do. And what they did was the will and workings of the God in heaven. Concerning ravaging the Indians and burning their lands, commenting on the wanton killing of many Indian lives, a colonial contemporary to Mrs. Rowland responded: "We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings." (12) It was God's will and words, not the colonists', that directed the colonists to and in the New World.

What about Puritan love, kindness, mercy and compassion among the Indians? Asserting that "it is not the nature of the Englishmen to deal like heathens, to requite evil for evil. . ." (13), the English call the Indians infidels, barbarous creatures, heathens, devils, roaring lions, savage bears, black creatures, creatures of the night, and murderers. Then, in prayer, the colonists ask God for victory over these gentiles, while these "butcherers'" red bodies and blood were already floating in the

rivers as the Pilgrims' prayers simultaneously rose up to the ears of their God on high who ruled over them.

Again, for the Puritans the best way to heal the woes and mend the ways of the heathen New England Indians was to kill them. After all, because they had not been baptized, the Indians could not get into the Kindom of Heaven; nor did they have churches and religion; nor did they attempt to educate their young, for they had no schools and they could neither read nor write; and thus, the Indians knew nothing of the words and works of God, of education, or civilization--or so the Puritans thought. The Puritans, therefore, did not suffer the devils to live. The Puritans did this work for and in the name of God.

In no account is this view and these actions more apparent than in the account of the first American war, the Pequot War of 1636, a war which pitted some three thousand Pequots against the militia of the Massachusetts Bay. A leader of the militia, Captain Underhill, claimed that "the custom of war" was introduced by the British among the Indians, not because of greed; not for lust of land and natural resources; not for the purposes of bringing salvation to the savage. Rather, the cause was that ". . .the old serpent. . . stirred them up against the Church of Christ." (14)

Underhill fails to attend the fact that one of the fur traders dealing with the Indians had his boat turned over because the Indians felt the trader was demanding too many furs in exchange for too few goods, and tipping the boat over was the Indians' only recourse to justice. This one act led to the

Massachusetts Bay Colony's banding together to see that no more acts of defiance take place among the Indians in future trading relations.

Thus began the Pequot, not the Massachusetts Bay Colony, War. When the day was over, the entire group of 3,000 Pequot men, women, and children living in their forest village was dead, either by burning, being kept within the ring of fire set round their village; or by rifle shot, being lead-balled to death as they tried to flee the flames that devoured their tepees and timber and cremated their wives and children. But these lost lives were not human. These painful deaths were not deeds or deaths of woe. Such was the Puritan perspective.

Even William Bradford, Governor of New England, shows a very narrow, one-sided view of the Indians in colonial America. In his Of Plymouth Plantation, Bradford talks of the Indians as if they were not people, but wild animals in the forests. He speaks of the ". . . vast an (sic.) unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful & fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants. . . ." (15) It is still shocking, however, to read Bradford say that the violent deaths that occurred at a massacre of Indians were "sweet incense to Jehovah."

Since European America began, the American Indians have been severely wounded. Their trails of tears and deaths extend over much of the land for 350 years. They have been called beasts and savages and uncivilized devils. They have been killed by militias, bloated by starvation, struck down and decimated by small pox, and choked by death marches and armies. They have

lost their culture, their lands, their families, their traditions, and almost their languages. They have heard long in and out of the boarding school that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. They have seen the salvation that comes to savages. They have suffered through the Indian Removal Act engineered by "Sharp Knife Jackson" in 1830. They have seen "manifest destiny" sprout from apple seeds. They have lived through the American nation's bi-centennial when on June 25, a week before the 4th of July in 1876, Generals Custer and Reno rode out with an army to kill the last 10,000 Sioux who would not stay on their reservation. They have seen Big Foot and his people lying, frozen dead in the South Dakota snow. They have lived through the Century of Dishonor almost four times. They have heard Chief Joseph say that from where the sun now stands, he would fight again no more forever. They have tasted of the "melting pot" but have not been nourished by its contents. They have seen bounties given Indian hunters for the ears of their Indian mothers and grandfathers and kin--until 1917, when Minnesota revoked its laws granting such incentives. They have lived long enough to become U.S. citizens in 1924. But they have not lived long enough yet to be be considered anything more than part of the flora and fauna of the American forests or the dust and dirt of its deserts.

The red man, the red woman in the contemporary world--not Americans, not Indians, but prisoners of war, captives in their own homeland--the Indians have been mortally wounded by our hands in the past, but we must help heal them in the future. Yet we

should no longer blame God or ourselves for the Indians' plights.

With the great emphasis on civil rights in the 1960's and early 1970's, historians and writers began to focus on Indians themselves, adding that, "in Miller Indians had been simply beneath notice; in Vaughan, they belonged to an inferior culture; and in Jennings they were more or less innocent prey of power-hungry whites." (16) But today, it is time to turn to the Indians themselves, to their perspectives and prospects. At their request, we must be messengers of peace and missionaries of prosperity. We must be tools of service and vehicles of help to these our brothers and sisters that they, too, might forget their nightmares and achieve their causes and dreams. It is time to cease wounding the Indians with the one hand and wounding them by the other. It is time to heal. It is time to be physician on the one hand and balm of Gilead on the other. It is only in this manner that those who have lost health can hope to be restored to it. It is we, contemporary Americans and Indians--not the Puritans or God--that must work this work and see that all who are wounded among us might be healed.

Endnotes

1. Jane Tompkins,"Indians": Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History," Critical Inquiry, 13(Autumn, 1986), 105.

2. Dee Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 3.

3. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans. 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). The single reference to Indians in Miller in volume I is on pages 154-56.

4. Tomkins, p. 107.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. pp. 106-107.

7. Richard M. Dorson, ed. America Begins (Greenwick, Connecticut: Fawsett), pp. 247-48.

8. Ibid., p. 246.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. As quoted in Tomkins, p. 112.

12. Dorson, p. 408.

13. Ibid., p. 409.

14. Ibid., p. 398.

15. William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 40.

16. Tomkins, pp. 116-18.